

CITY OF BIRMINGHAM

Planning Events That Are ADA Compliant

**Office of Americans with
Disabilities (ADA)**



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with Disabilities

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Why Do Public Events Need to be Accessible?

It's the law! The 1990 Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) and the City of Birmingham public meeting laws protect the rights of people with disabilities to participate in public events. The law stresses reasonable accommodations, as well as the provision of auxiliary aids and services. It is also a good business practice that can be relatively inexpensive.

NOTES

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The Event Management Team

Your own team is critical to ensuring your event is as accessible as possible. If they are well prepared and trained they will be able to deal with any problems and make any necessary changes on the day as the need arises.

You should think about training for you and your staff. Disability awareness training is available and can be tailored to meet your needs. You can expect disability awareness training to include an introduction to the ADA, an awareness/sensitivity of disability, and how to meet some of the requirements of people with disabilities.

What's the best language to use?

If you are making the effort to make your event more accessible, it is also important to make sure your staff and the signage you use is consistent with that effort.

Use signage that identifies:

- 'Accessible Toilet' not 'Disabled Toilet'
- 'Accessible Parking' not 'Disabled Parking'
- 'Accessible Entry' not 'Disabled Entry'.

Use Appropriate Language. Refer to:

- **A person with a disability** rather than a disabled person;
- **A person who uses a wheelchair** rather than someone confined to one;
- **A person who is blind** rather than a person who suffers blindness.



Think About Access Early

The most effective way of ensuring access for everyone is to think about access at the earliest stage of planning.

Example: If you ensure that physical access to a venue and good internal signage are some of your initial criteria for booking a venue you will not have to look for access solutions later.

Booking services and supports

Even if they will not be used it is good practice to book services such as sign language interpreters and hearing augmentation systems early on in your planning.

These service providers are in high demand; the longer notice they have the better the chances of you being able to secure them. Discuss the cancellation policies of these service providers and make sure there is time between the close of registration and the event for you to cancel the service if there has been no request for the service.

Involving people with disabilities.

A good way of ensuring the best possible access would be to involve people with disabilities in planning your event.

Budget

While most access issues can be resolved through good planning and preparation, some arrangements may have cost implications; be prepared.

Choosing a Venue



Finding an accessible venue can be very difficult. You will already have criteria in your search, people it can hold, the cost, and whether it has the facilities to suit your event such as a stage area, breakout rooms and etc.

At this early stage, you should also be thinking about criteria to help you find a venue that is equally accessible for everyone. As a starting point, you should ask questions relative to accessibility. For example:

- Whether the operator is aware of anti-discrimination laws and their responsibilities to provide equal access.
- Whether there have been any access issues in the past and if so how the operator has dealt with them.
- Whether venue staff have ever had a disability awareness training. If the venue is not ideal it may be possible to make improvements for your event.
- The **City of Birmingham's ADA Office on Compliance** is available to assist you and provide assistance in planning your event and in offering **Disability Awareness and Sensitivity Training**.

Access Checklist

Early Planning -develop an access policy to guide your organization. Seek advice from an access expert and/or disability organizations.

Budget for Unforeseen Accommodations - to address access requirements (production of accessible material, sign language interpreters and hiring hearing loops).

Venue Accessibility- discuss access requirements being considered; visit preferred venues before confirming bookings.

1. Is there level access with no steps or other barriers from the arrival point to the main entrance or area?
2. Are doors into venue and rooms being used wide enough for a wheelchair user to get through and easy to open?
3. Is there at least one accessible unisex toilet at the same location on as other toilets or close by?
4. Is there clear signage to direct people from the entrance(s) to any information in the facility or space being used?
5. If the venue has an inbuilt PA system is there a hearing loop or similar system to assist people with hearing impairment? If not do consider hiring a portable system?
6. Is it possible to 'spotlight' speakers and sign language interpreters if they are to be used?
7. Is there designated accessible parking? Is there a curb ramp at the drop off point to allow a person using a wheelchair to get from the to the entrance?
8. Do the venue operators understand their responsibility to allow service animals (dogs) into the venue?

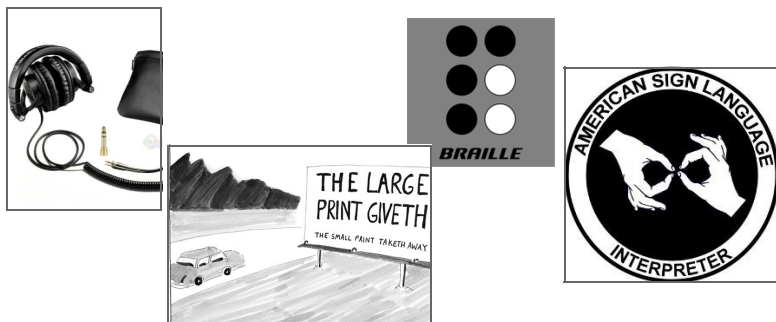
Making Information Accessible

When you produce written information for your event, such as programs, and hand outs, you will need to think about how you will make these accessible for people with disabilities. Sometimes this might include producing information in different formats.

There are a number of different formats that people may prefer or require.

- **For people who are blind** or vision impaired these include large print, Braille, audio tape or an accessible electronic format.
- **Hearing Impaired**-There are a number of ways audio information can be provided for Deaf people or people with a hearing impairment.

Material may be provided in a written form prior to or at the event; note takers may produce a running commentary, hearing augmentation systems may be available, steno-captioned may be employed to reproduce speeches in real-time, projected onto a screen.



Tips for Finding an Accessible Venue

The list of tips is not exhaustive, but will assist in identifying accessible features at a venue:



Is there level access with no steps or barriers from the arrival point through the main entrance (s), to all the areas being used by participants?

- If there is a reception desk, is it (or a part of it) at a height that is accessible for people using wheelchairs? If not, can an alternative desk be provided for the event?
- If there is a speaker's or performer's platform, is it accessible?
- Are the accessible unisex toilets at the same location as other toilets or close by?
- Is there clear signage to direct people from the entrance (s) to any information desk and all the facilities being used?
- If participants have to use lifts to get to facilities are they large enough for people using wheelchairs to use?
- If the venue has fixed seating are there wheelchair-accessible spaces provided at various locations spread throughout the venue?
- Is there a choice of seating available that will provide extra support for people with disabilities who might need it?

- Is the venue large enough to allow people with disabilities to freely move around when all participants are present?
- Are there good acoustics?
- Is there a hearing augmentation system, and is it functioning properly?
- Are the surfaces on the paths, inside and outside, even and slip resistant?
- For emergencies, are there clear evacuation procedures in place and do they take account of people with disabilities, including people with sensory impairments and mobility impairments?
- Is there good maneuverability around areas where food and drinks are served?

Remember, all disabilities are not visible. If you have planned reasonable accommodations for everyone, you are covered.



Accessible Events

Support Workers and Assistants

Some people with disabilities may be accompanied by support workers, or personal assistants. Their role is to assist the person with a disability to participate fully in the event and they will only attend to the requirements of the person they are there to support.



You will need to think in advance how you will respond to support workers who attend your event. Each situation will be different but, in general terms, if the person is solely there to provide assistance, you should consider not charging admission, or charging only enough to cover basic costs such as catering for attendant.

Accessible Events

Selling Tickets

If you are selling tickets for your event, you will need to ensure the system for booking is accessible.

For example, box offices should be located in a place where people using wheelchairs can access them or have alternative accommodations.

Seat Allocation

Make sure there are flexible seating arrangements that allow for a choice of seating; requiring everyone who uses a wheelchair to sit at the back behind a pillar is not appropriate.

If you are issuing seats on a first come, first-served basis, you should allocate wheelchair accessible seats last so as to ensure they remain available if people with disabilities need them.

People who are Deaf or have a hearing impairment are likely to prefer seats where they have a good view of what is happening on the stage or speakers. Ensuring this option will assist people who lip read to do so and also ensure that any communication support, such as sign language interpreters, are not obscured.

Outdoor Events

- **Ensuring the event layout**, for example, where port-a-let stalls are located, best access and circulation and ensuring that the location of stalls or performance areas do not block curb ramps.
- Providing parking spaces close to the event for people with disabilities.
- Making sure any street closures do not include the use of traffic control barriers that result in blocking curb ramps or paths of travel.
- Installing portable accessible toilet facilities, directional signage and information tables/ tents.
- Covering some grassy areas with materials that make mobility easier.
- Ensuring cables are secure and don't present a trip hazard.
- Designating small areas close to stage for use by people using wheelchairs.
- Producing an 'Access Map' for the event and putting the map and other access related information online.



Accessible signage

Access starts with parking or making provisions for accessible drop off points for persons with disabilities.



Sometimes it is necessary to post areas **NOT Accessible** and direct patron to an accessible route, entrance or facility. **To insure access and reduce confusion, personal ambassadors** may be used to assist and direct traffic.



Other Signage to Consider



All venues should include interpreting services where speakers are utilized and a designated area in front to accommodate deaf persons who read sign language so the interpreter can be seen.



Having a **visible staffed hospitality area** where volunteers answer questions and provide direction will help reduce confusion. Don't forget people with disabilities make great greeters.

Hospitality Volunteers

